The Elderly Population

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The elderly population increased elevenfold between 1900 and 1994; the nonelderly increased only threefold.

In this century, the rate of growth of the elderly population (persons 65 years old and over) has greatly exceeded the growth rate of the population of the country as a whole. The elderly increased by a factor of 11, from 3 million in 1900 to 33 million in 1994. In comparison, the total population, as well as the population under 65 years old, tripled. Under the Census Bureau's middle series projections, the number of persons 65 years old and over would more than double by the middle of the next century to 80 million. About 1 in 8 Americans were elderly in 1994, but about 1 in 5 would be elderly by the year 2030.[1]

The oldest old is the fastest growing segment of the elderly population.

The oldest old (persons 85 years old and over) are a small but rapidly growing group, comprising just over 1 percent of the American population in 1994. This population comprised 3.5 million persons in 1994, 28 times larger than in 1900. From 1960 to 1994, this group increased 274 percent, compared with an increase of 100 percent for persons 65 years old and over, and an increase of 45 percent for the total population. Overall, the oldest old are projected to be the fastest growing part of the elderly population into the next century.

[1]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Jennifer Cheeseman Day, *Population Projections of the United States, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1993 to 2050*, Current Population Reports, P25-1104, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993.

As age increases, the sex ratio decreases.

Perhaps no feature of the oldest old is as striking as their sex ratio (the number of males per 100 females), which was 39 in 1994 (982,000 males and 2.5 million females). The sex ratio in the United States was 44 for persons 85 to 89 years old, and only 26 for persons 95 to 99 years old. In comparison, the sex ratio was 82 for persons 65 to 69 years old.

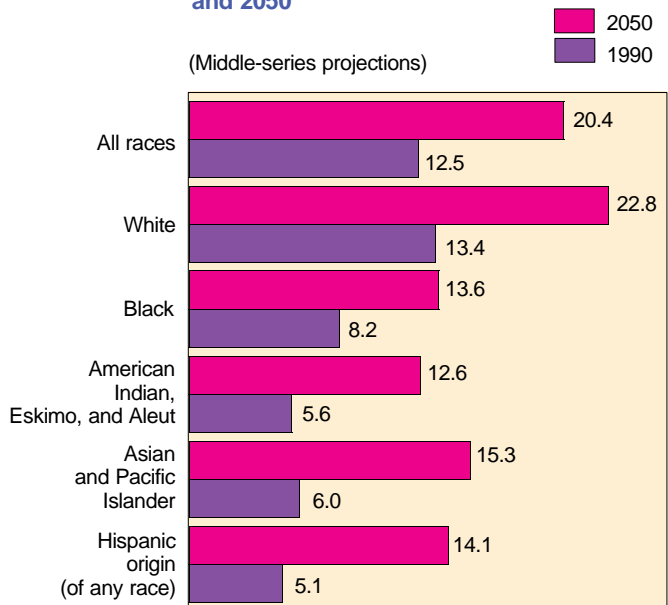## The racial and ethnic diversity among the elderly is expected to increase in the future.

Of the Nation's elderly in 1994, about 29.8 million were White; 2.7 million were Black; 137,000 were American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut; 615,000 were Asian and Pacific Islander; and 1.5 million were of Hispanic origin.[2]

[2]Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. These data do not include the population of Puerto Rico.

We expect the elderly population to become even more racially and ethnically diverse in the future. Hispanic elderly would increase from less than 4 percent of the total elderly population in 1990 to 16 percent by the middle of the next century. The percent Black of the total elderly population also would increase during the coming decades. Excluding the Hispanic population from the race categories, the Black non-Hispanic proportion of the elderly population by the middle of the next century would be 10 percent, the White non-Hispanic proportion 67 percent, and the Asian and Pacific Islander proportion 7 percent.

The proportion elderly within each of the four major race groups and the Hispanic origin population is expected to substantially increase during the first half of the 21st cen- tury. From 1990 to 2050, the proportion elderly would increase from 13 to 23 percent for Whites; from 8 to 14 percent for Blacks; from 6 to

Percent Elderly, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1990 and 2050

(Middle-series projections)

Legend: 2050, 1990

Race / Hispanic Origin	2050	1990
All races	20.4	12.5
White	22.8	13.4
Black	13.6	8.2
American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut	12.6	5.6
Asian and Pacific Islander	15.3	6.0
Hispanic origin (of any race)	14.1	5.1

13 percent for American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts; from 6 to 15 percent for Asians and Pacific Islanders; and from 5 to 14 percent for Hispanics.

The proportion elderly varies among the 50 States and the District of Columbia.

In 1993, the most populous States were also the ones with the largest number of elderly. Nine States had more than 1 million elderly: California, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, and New Jersey. In general, the States with a large number of elderly differ from those States with a high proportion of their population in the elderly ages (Florida and Pennsylvania are exceptions). For example, while California easily has the largest number of elderly persons (3 million), its proportion elderly (11 percent) ranks 46th among the 50 States and the District of Columbia.

Of all the States, Florida had by far the highest proportion elderly, almost 19 percent. Other States with high proportions elderly (14 to 16 percent), ranked in descending order, were Pennsylvania, Iowa, Rhode Island, West Virginia, Arkansas, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Missouri, Connecticut, Kansas, and Massachusetts.

Heart disease is the leading killer of the elderly.

In 1980, 3 of 4 elderly deaths were due to heart disease, cancer, or stroke. These three major causes of death still were responsible for 7 of every 10 elderly deaths in 1991. Among major disease groups, heart disease is the leading cause of death within the elderly population. The total number of deaths due to heart disease in 1991 was about the same as in 1980, at just under 600,000.

The need for personal assistance with everyday activities increases with age.

The extent of the need for personal assistance with everyday activities is an indicator of the need for health and social services. Data for 1990 and 1991 from the Survey of Income and Program Participation reveal a strong relationship between age and the need for personal assistance. These data showed that 4.5 million elderly persons needed assistance with one or more activities of daily living.[3] At older ages, the proportion requiring personal assistance ranged from 9 percent for those 65 to 69 years old, to 50 percent for those 85 years old and over. Within

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[3]U.S. Bureau of the Census, John M. McNeil, *Americans With Disabilities: 1991-92,* Data From the Survey of Income and Program Participation, Current Population Reports, Household Economic Studies, P70-33, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993.

each age category, women were more likely to need assistance than men. For example, among noninstitutionalized persons 75 years old and over, 33 percent of women needed help, compared with 23 percent of men. Elderly Blacks and Hispanics were more likely than Whites to need assistance (25, 25, and 17 percent respectively).

The elderly poverty rate has declined since 1970, but wide differences remain between subgroups.

The Current Population Survey shows that between 1972 and 1992, real median income (in constant 1992 dollars) increased by 23 percent for elderly males and 36 percent for elderly females. Nevertheless, wide disparities in income exist between men and women and among race and Hispanic-origin groups.

The poverty rate among the elderly declined from 25 percent in 1970 to 13 percent in 1992. However, poverty rates varied considerably among subgroups of the population. Elderly women were more likely to be poor (16 percent) than elderly men (9 percent) in 1992. Among elderly Blacks, 27 percent of men and 38 percent of women were poor. Among elderly Hispanics, 17 percent of men and 25 percent of women were poor (not a statistically significant difference).

For Further Information

See: Current Population Reports, Series P23-190, *Sixty-Five Plus in the U.S.,* forthcoming.

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Percent Elderly, by State: 1993

Percent
- 14.0 and over
- 13.0 to 13.9
- 12.0 to 12.9
- Under 12.0

United States 12.6